

# Coal board refuses to grant permits for private sector mining

By Paul Routledge, Industrial Editor

A political dispute is developing over the National Coal Board's refusal to grant open-cast mining permits to private sector companies trying to beat the miner's strike.

Conservative backbench MPd are putting pressure on Mr Giles Shaw, Under-Secretary of State at the Department of Energy responsible for coal, to compel the board to allow more rapid exploitation of easily worked coal reserves near the surface in areas where the deep mines are strikebound.

They argue that the board has failed in its statutory duty to secure "the efficient development of the coal mining industry," and their campaign is directed towards opening up the industry to a flourishing private sector.

Mr Michael Fallon, MP, for Darlington, said yesterday: "There is a strong case for a fresh Act taking open-cast mining out of the hands of the coal board. There is a great

interest among private contractors to do the work."

In the short term, the MPs want an obligation on the board to grant more licences to private mineral developers who already produce about one million tonnes of coal a year and could produce five times that amount.

The issues has come to a head in the North-east, where one of the biggest private licensed operators, H. J. Banks, is to make 100 of its 225 workers redundant over the next two months unless the coal board gives immediate permission to exploit new capacity.

Mr Harry Banks, chairman of the company, has told the Confederation of British Industry: "Our production is now down to less than 1,500 tonnes a week, and many of those men who have been crossing picket lines and who would otherwise have been producing coal will shortly be dismissed. Other small businesses in the private sector of the coal-mining indus-

try are facing similar problems."

Responding to an appeal from the confederation's director-general, Sir Terence Beckett, for energy savings to defeat the National Union of Mineworkers, Mr Banks argued: "Your concern to maintain resistance to the actions of the NUM seems not to be fully shared by the National Coal Board.

"During the coal strike we have continued to supply and sell coal, and it has been of value to industry both local and not so local." Cement firms, small industries, and power stations have been supplied, Mr Banks said.

"We have had problems with pickets - more than 140 have been arrested at our gates - but the work force have been resolute and during the period of the strike the company has produced and sold more than 90,000 tonnes of much-needed coal.

## 'Silver Birch' named in appeal to miners

By Barrie Clement, Labour Reporter

The identity of the anti-pit - strike activist "Silver Birch" was revealed yesterday when he appealed for a mas return to work today.

Mr Chris Butcher, aged 34, a blacksmith at Bevercotes Colliery, Nottinghamshire, said that he had come out into the open to prevent his friends being hurt and intimidated by militant miners who were trying to identify him.

But industry observers said yesterday that many miners were not prepared to face the physical intimidation involved in returning to the work, while others thought the choice of the right-wing Mail on Sunday disclose his identity was not wise.

Mr Butcher appealed in the newspaper: "Let's all get back to work on Monday. Get your wives to pack your lunch and then go to your pits.

"I'm going to mine as I have for the past 21 weeks. So join me now and strike a blow for democracy. Don't let the left-wing bully boys destroy your lives".

On Radio 4's *The World This Weekend* Mr Butcher said he agreed with the strike's basic principle, opposition to pit closure.

But he said that in Yorkshire 80 per cent of striking miners wanted to return to work for a national ballot to be held and it was probably the same in other areas.

Meanwhile, the police kept a close watch on Mr Butcher's home at Ollerton, Nottingham, for fear of reprisals. Mr Butcher has two children.

Mr Henry Richardson, pro-strike secretary of the Nottingham miners, yesterday condemned the violence against the National Coal Board and working miners by the "South Nottingham Hit Squad".

A member of the group rang BBC Radio Nottingham to claim responsibility for the vandalizing of a coal transport depot at South Normanton, near Mansfield, on Friday, which caused about £4,000 worth of damage to fourteen lorries and two coaches.

## Pitmen will meet over £50,000 fine

By Our Labour Reporter

Miners' leaders in South Wales will today discuss their next move in the battle to avoid paying a £50,000 fine for contempt of court.

Accounts held at the Co-operative Bank and the Midland Bank have been frozen by sequestrators appointed by the High Court and it is difficult to see how the area executive of the National Union of Mineworkers can avoid the seizure of its funds.

The executive will meet in its barricaded headquarters in Pontypridd which has been occupied by striking miners for five days.

Price Waterhouse the accountancy firm, acting for the court, has written to the union asking for cooperation in tracing its assets and offering to meet miners' leaders.

A senior partner at the firm has said that an account at Midland Bank meant for strikers' families could be released if the NUM supplied the required information.

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